15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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177 Aborigines could never be mistaken for liberty, civilization, and Christianity.' Early settlers appropriated everything of value, and when they came into contact with aborigines and their Stone Age beliefs and customs, they could not appreciate their complex social organization and fanatical regard for ancient hunting-grounds and sacred sites. Hence the clashes and feuds of pioneering days.

Aboriginal depopulation was not entirely due to punitive [165] measures and to introduced diseases, for Stone Age man continued to die whenever he came into contact with modern man. In 1820 the British Government granted ten thousand acres at Port Macquarie as an aboriginal reserve; a mission- [197] ary worked there for seventeen years, but by that time the people were extinct and the reserve was abandoned. A realistic missionary of that day wrote: 'Judging from present appearances, by the time the missionary shall have acquired the language so as to preach the Gospel he will have no one to preach to.'

165 In less than a century-and-a-half the full-blood aboriginal 177 population of Australia declined to fifty thousand, and the majority of these exist in unwanted or poverty-stricken areas of the continent. All who have had the good fortune to see the unspoiled remnants of this, the oldest of all living races, are puzzled by this decrease in population, and vague suggestions of racial suicide through crude forms of abortion make one ask increasingly: 'Why will they not propagate?' and 'Why do they lose the will to live?' It is a racial tragedy, this diminishing of a people who traversed the hemispheres before the days of the pyramids, this crumbling of a social organization as old as gregarian man, this dissolution of a race too old to be classified with any modern race, but so human that any existing race could have evolved from them.

131 However, they are not all dead—yet! In isolated parts of 657 north and north-west Australia nomads roam the bush and rugged mountains of large Reserves. Arnhem Land is the

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greatest of the Reserves and is in the north of the Northern Territory. Its northern shores are washed by the Arafura Sea; on the east it is bounded by the Gulf of Carpentaria; and to the south lies the barrier of high, impenetrable, barren sand-stone mountains and deep gorges. Approximately thirty-four thousand square miles of this desolate country, with its aboriginal population of three thousand, was declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931.

The writing of this book has entailed the collecting of notes, incidents, myths, and nomads' quaint sayings, which I have jotted down on scraps of paper or on the fly-leaves of books I have had with me in the bush, in aboriginal canoes, or on luggers. In the spelling of aboriginal names and phrases I have not used any system of phonetics, but have attempted to give ordinary English letter values. 'Yulengor' is a general race-term applied by Stone Age men of east Arnhem Land to all nomads, in the way that we refer to them as aborigines. 'Yulengor' is not used elsewhere.

I gratefully acknowledge help given by Professor A. P. Elkin who prepared the illuminating introduction. But for my wife the notes would have been offered to the public years ago, and she has my thanks for the wisdom of such restraint, and for encouragement and constructive criticism as I have attempted to convey to the printed page the fascinating customs, unforgettable experiences, and mind-teasing Yulengor sayings of Arnhem Land.

W. S. C.

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